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THE ART OF WOOD-CARVING.

FIRST ARTICLE.

FRENCH SCHOOLS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

NORMANDY.

CLAUDE DE SEYSSSEL, writing the History of Louis XII. in 1508, remarks that "for one rich merchant to be found in Rouen at the time of Louis XI., there are fifty to-day," and adds, "Everywhere in the kingdom magnificent edifices are being erected, both public and private, rich in gilding, not only the floors and inside walls being covered, but the outside as well, including roofs, towers, and statues. The furnishing of houses is more sumptuous than ever seen before." In this effervescence of the Renaissance Normandy played an exceptional part. The discovery of America, giving an impetus to foreign traffic, made the fortune of the province. The ship-owners of Rouen and Dieppe built themselves magnificent homes and lived like princes; on all sides most costly churches, abbeys, and manors were to be seen, also magnificent fountains. The richest burghers built their houses with plastered walls ornamented with panels of carved wood. The millionaire Ango, desiring that his dwelling should be the most beautiful in the kingdom, erected a wooden house at Dieppe whose oak front was covered with carving from the base to the top of the attic windows; in the interior were rich ceilings and gilded wain-

scoting, framing pictures by the finest artists. One hundred years later, Cardinal Barberini, visiting the old home of the great ship-builder, enthusiastically exclaimed, "I have never seen a more beautiful wooden house." Building in wood remained in favor until the time of Blois (1579); but its most brilliant period commenced with Louis XII. and ended with Francis I. Sixty years ago the towns of Rouen, Caen, and Lisieux still contained a large number of curiously-carved houses; these beautiful relics of Norman wood-carving had survived, despite wars, fires, and the incursion of English collectors, who swept down upon Normandy immediately after the Revolution, carrying away furniture, hangings, windows, statues, and wood-work. Most of these houses have disappeared before the encroachments of modern civilization.

Aided by a commercial prosperity without parallel, the Norman Renaissance was still further favored by the patronage of an archbishop passionately devoted to art and immensely wealthy. The illustrious Georges d'Amboise knew Italy well through having passed many years there, but he intrusted the adornment of his palace at Rouen and the construction

of his château at Gaillon to French artists, thus adding his testimony to the talent and popularity of our old masters. Among the twenty-one carpenters employed on the work of building the château, there was not one Italian; the most eminent of the number was Colin Castille of Rouen, master-carpenter of the Rouen Cathedral and of the Abbey of Saint-Ouen. The magnificent chapel pulpits preserved at Saint-Denis are the work of Guerpe, Delaplace, Colin Castille, and Cornedieu; Thibault Roze received "fifteen solz* for six vellum parchments for portraits in the pulpits of the chapel (1509)." Monsieur Maillet du Boullay has a panel from Gaillon, and Monsieur Spitzer a dresser with two medallions, of probably the same origin. Another stray bit from Gaillon, once a part of the Révoil collection, is now at the Louvre: it is the outside of a choir door, which has been made into an armoire.

The two stalls of the Abbey of Arques (Spitzer collection), and the Argentelles bed (Orne), recently exhibited at the Palace of Industry, belong to the first years of the sixteenth century. The flamboyant Gothic decoration is carved with the vigorous, free, and generous chisel which characterizes the Norman school. In the sculpture of Argentelles the firm hand never wavers; "the knife cuts from top to bottom of each figure like a sketching-chisel in potter's clay, marking in its passage the most delicate details of form and drapery with a freedom of execution truly admirable." The carving of Saint-Vincent at Rouen, and the stalls of Sonlay (Orne), are of the time of

Francis I. These finely-carved stalls are ascribed to the hand of Gervais of Domfront, who must have produced them in 1535. The baptismal fonts of Bretonnelles and the church of Saint-Romain, the doors of Gisors, a ceiling of the cathedral of Lisieux, the wood-work of the cathedral of Evreux, the church of Chavigny, and the abbeys of Boc, Breuil, and Estrée, are of the same epoch. One of the finest and best-preserved specimens of the Norman school is to be found at Rouen, up the first flight of the tower of the Hôtel Bourgtheroulde; it is the interior decoration of a room whose wainscoting, beginning at the floor, is composed of panels with drapery; the vault of the ceiling, covered with arabesques, is divided into six parts, which unite at the centre in a magnificent hanging key formed of sirens; each arch is supported by a caryatid, and the gilding of the ceiling is extremely rich and elegant.

Evreux and Saint-André have supplied commerce with a large number of wood-carvings, apparently the work of one family; the foliage, formed of extremely tenuous stalks, unfolds itself with unerring precision and terminates in short leaves massed together and standing out in bold relief in the peculiar manner well known to collectors. The same style reveals itself in the ceiling of the organ-loft of Evreux. The generally accepted opinion is that the carvings of this family originated in the ateliers of Saint-André de l'Eure,—celebrated workshops of the sixteenth century, conducted by master-workmen, whose successors are still to be found in the same locality. Desiring to know how much foundation there was

* Obsolete.

for this belief, accepted by the trade and Parisian collectors, the Archbishop de l'Eure was consulted, and announced that after closest research no papers relative to these ateliers have been found in his department, and he moreover said that no tradition concerning the manufacture of furniture in this place in the sixteenth century is current in the country. The Comte de Reiset, who for forty-five years has been engaged in amassing, in his château at Breuil, a remarkable collection of carved wood from this place and bought upon the spot, writes that "no ancient document mentions the existence of a workshop in the canton of Saint-André de l'Eure; but forty years ago, two distinguished artists, the Messieurs Cissey and Lesas, the last-mentioned being one of the old wood-carvers employed by Monsieur de Reiset, established an atelier of sculpture at Saint-André, which became justly renowned." To this fact may be attributed the confusion which still exists between the modern workshop of Saint-André, recently established, and the atelier of the sixteenth century, which never existed.

In 1540 and 1541 the name of Jean Goujon appeared for the first time in Rouen on an official document: the accounts of the factory of Saint-Maclou mention a payment made to "Master Jehan Goujon for portraits on a portal." Nothing more is recorded. Did the artist furnish the drawings and models of the three doors which still exist, and did he himself execute his designs? These are questions often debated. The three doors, notably the one in the transept, seem to be of later date than 1541. Without doubt Jean

Goujon was the originator, and the doors were the work of an architect; the execution seems too choice for the time of Francis I., and may reasonably be regarded as of more recent date. Notwithstanding this, the novelty of design and the surpassing beauty of composition are the work of a great artist, who could be no other than Jean Goujon, who was charged with executing the "portraits on a portal." He alone could have designed the figure of the Virgin, now mutilated, which stands upright on the central column; he alone could compass that tall, lithe, majestic grace, that original arrangement of drapery, and the beautiful console on which rests the infant Jesus. The bas-relief method introduced by Jean Goujon is his mark and stamp. While the general effect of the composition and the models of the principal parts seem to be his work, more cannot be ascribed to him. It is possible that the drawings and original models were somewhat modified: in the sixteenth century the workman was permitted great freedom of interpretation, and the carver charged with reproducing the designs of the great master may have introduced some of his own originality into the composition.

The doors of Saint-Maclou are the most important work of Jean Goujon at Rouen; in 1541 he was already a master,—that is, an artist with an established reputation. During his stay in Rouen he must have produced a large number of works of which there is now no record. His influence was great, as it shook the old Norman school, so profoundly attached to ancient traditions, from centre to circumference; it can be traced as far as

the doors of the church at Harfleur, near Hâvre, which are surmounted by two small recumbent figures in the style of the master. Cabinet-makers borrowed his favorite designs, modillions, figures, and masks, in order to apply them to furniture. Oak chests are still to be seen in Normandy which are modelled more or less after the doors of Saint-Maclou; some are of superior workmanship, such as the chest belonging to Monsieur Roussel, of which there is a very inferior reproduction in the Cluny Museum; another similar piece of furniture, found at Pont-Audemer, represents nymphs and sea-monsters, beautifully executed. These chests are of Rouen manufacture. As that town made a specialty of beautiful furniture, all the surrounding provinces came there for supplies, and the Sire de Gouberville, who lived in the suburbs of Caen, writes in 1556, "Paid to Pierre Corbeille, who brought me a small chest from Rouen in his ship, the sum of four 'solz.'"

Some Norman wood-carvers made their fortune abroad. Jacques Lefèvre was called to England and employed by Queen Elizabeth, others travelled into Italy, carrying with them their traditions, talent, and reputation. One of

the more obscure of their number, Grégoire of Normandy, worked in Florence in 1519 as assistant to Pierre Guillemard, an image-carver from Lyons. One other, Richard Taurin, was celebrated; to him was intrusted the work on the stalls in the choir of Milan and on those in Sainte-Justine at Padua; Lomazzo calls him "the rarest sculptor in the world." Disagreeable in all respects, Taurin was as quarrelsome as the true Norman always is. In the absence of Italian carvers in Normandy, it is interesting to find Norman carvers in Italy, particularly one who made such a reputation there.

As the sixteenth century advanced, the Norman school declined. The manufacture, engaged in supplying the constant demands of commerce, became commonplace; as articles were designed for instant sale, the requirements of art were not consulted, the memory of the master faded, and his methods were lost. Normandy is credited with some walnut cabinets of exquisitely delicate workmanship, which appear to belong to the reign of Henry IV., and present this peculiarity, that the lateral columns are of wood from the West Indies with inlaid ornaments and ebony convolutions.

BURGUNDY—FRANCHE-COMTÉ.

"In Burgundy," says Viollet-le-Duc, speaking of French art of the twelfth century, "sculptural ornamentation, imitating more and more closely the real floral form, finally ends in exaggeration; it seems to burst beyond the bounds imposed by architecture, and, assuming

undue proportions, often mars the effect of the whole. Power, energy, a bold and lifelike execution, are the characteristics of this school, the delicacy and distinction which mark the school of the Isle of France being sought in vain; it strives for large effects and obtains

them. The chisel is wielded with a spirit and energy which place the school at the head of all monumental art."

This exuberant and bountiful genius, full of vigor, strength, and life, has stood the test of centuries, despite changing fashions and revolutions: in the words of M. Taine, "it seems to have its root in flesh and blood, in the air and in the soil." Stimulated by the Flemish influence and realism of Van Eyck, fostered by the showy taste of the House of Burgundy, it maintained its position during the whole period of the Renaissance. One of the finest artists of the province, Philippe Vigarny, called by the people on the other side of the Pyrenees Filipe de Borgoña, who for forty-five years, between 1498 and 1543, directed the Spanish school, carved the exquisite walnut stalls of Burgos and Toledo with a spirit and high artistic conception altogether Burgundian.

Burgundy is poor in furniture and wood-carving of the early Renaissance, the religious wars having left only fragments. At Dijon the ceiling of the Court of Assizes, a work somewhat heavy though extremely rich, bears the dates 1520 and 1522, and the name of the master-carver, Anthoine Gailley, said to be a German living at Dijon. It is doubtful whether Gailley was a German by birth, the name being wholly French; perhaps he was called Lallemand, a name borne by some artists from Tours, Paris, and Lorraine. A frieze of the same period, which was once a part of the château of Arnay-le-Duc, belongs to M. Recappé. In the church at Flavigny (Côte-d'Or) there is a simple bench with three seats and carved back and dais.

The stalls of Montbenoit, although the abbey is in Franche-Comté, belong to the Burgundian school, by reason of the close proximity of the two provinces. They bear the date 1527, and the coat-of-arms of Ferry Carondelet, Abbé of Montbenoit. Carondelet spent a part of his life in Italy, where Raphael painted his portrait; these facts have contributed to the hastily-formed conclusion that the stalls executed in his time were Italian. Modern critics have done only justice in dispelling the convenient tradition which invariably attributed the most perfect specimens of the French Renaissance to Italy, and according to which Italians practised an art in France which they never practised at home. How is it possible to attribute to them those lace-like ridges, those flat arch vaults, those grotesque figures in bracket shape, those strikingly fanciful capitals and semi-Gothic profiles and designs, charming barbarisms, which an admirer of Vitruve would have regarded as treason against antiquity? The stalls of Montbenoit, as well as the wood-work of that period and style in France, are the work of French artists who saw or had a glimpse of Italy and interpreted antiquity with freedom without departing too widely from the models, infusing at the same time into their work their genius, spirit, and individuality.

Hugues Sambin is another of those provincial artists who, notwithstanding the Italian infiltration, practised the new art without sacrificing anything of his independence or originality. Architect, engineer, sculptor, and engraver, Sambin figured extensively in Burgundian history. It is probable that he

travelled in Italy, though this cannot be established by any direct proof. The date of his birth is unknown.

The wood-work of Dijon shows the extent and indicates the character of Burgundian contemporary art. Hugues Sambin is represented there in all his picturesque originality, bold flights, research, and large ideas. The arrangement of figures seen in profile in railing-openings,—an arrangement so often reproduced in Burgundian furniture,—and the graceful pose of the melancholy and pensive caryatid on the large entrance-door, are his work. Sambin had almost a mania for caryatids, and in order that none should ignore this he left a curious volume, entitled “*Work on the Diversity of Terminals employed in Architecture, in Classified Order, by Master Hugues Sambin, living at Dijon, 1572.*” The book is dedicated to Eléonor Chabot, Governor of Burgundy, and is “a collection of thirty-seven plates, including the title-page, and eighteen male and female caryatids, accompanied with their bases, cornices, friezes, and decorations, together with observations on the numbers and measures proper and required.” At first sight these plates do not seem to justify the renown of the author; with the exception of a few well-drawn and delicately-adjusted figures, the greater number of terminals are too elaborate, whimsical, overloaded with ornamentation and strangely complicated details. It cannot be repeated too often that the Master Burgundian, like Du Cerceau and his fellow-artists, designed for ateliers, which imposed upon him the absolute necessity of inventing new models and novel arrangements, of opening unex-

plored fields, and of deserting beaten paths for those hitherto untraced. Sambin massed the decorations of six caryatids on one figure, knowing by experience that the workman understanding his art would select from the number. His drawings are not models to be strictly followed, but rather combinations of suggestions. Most of the furniture made under the supervision of Sambin or from his models reproduces certain ornamental details, borrowed from his book, which readily indicate their source.

A peculiar trait of the Burgundian manufacture consists in figures painted on cameos, dashed with gold: these were called “bronze figures.” Sambin, the inventor or introducer of this style of decoration, employed a specialist on this work, Everhard Brédin, a glass-painter of Dijon, who often accompanied him on his journeys. In 1581, Hugues Sambin went to Besançon to submit a plan for enlarging the hôtel-de-ville, which was adopted the following year through the intelligent patronage of Gauthiot d’Ancier, deputy governor of the city. Gauthiot was a lover of beautiful things, and had amassed a collection of paintings, gold-work, medals, bronzes, and choice furniture, including twenty cabinets, buffets, tables, and chests carved by the most renowned artists. Two specimens of this collector’s furniture escaped destruction,—one table now at the hôtel-de-ville of Besançon and a cabinet in the museum of that city; they are minutely described in the inventory taken after the death of Gauthiot. These two pieces, which recall the style of Sambin, were possibly designed by him, as he had excellent

reasons, in view of the plans submitted by him to the city, for making himself agreeable to Gauthiot; Pierre Chenevières, carpenter to the Gauthiot family and also to the city, probably executed the design, as Sambin had a lodging in his house, at the expense of the city, during his stay there, and the cabinet now in the museum is ornamented with eight "bronze figures," one of which has the signature of Brédin and the date of his collaboration: "E. Bredinus F. 1581."

There were many skilled artists in furniture-decoration in Burgundy, but few are known, old manuscripts affording little information on the subject. Toward the close of the century, François Briot, who was an engraver of medals at Montbéliard, his native city, seems to have exercised a certain influence on furniture-decoration. There are several specimens, among them the dresser of the hôtel-de-ville at Montbéliard, signed by Jérémie Carlin, the panels of which are an evident reproduction of this artist's graceful designs in pewter.

The furniture of Burgundy was renowned for the excellence of its carving and its individual character; a cabinet of Dijon workmanship was once spoken of as a Paris production now is. A large number of pieces still exist, particularly of the models of the latter part of the century, for the religious wars treated the Christian furniture of the early Renaissance more harshly than the pagan designs of later date. Majestic and rectilinear armoires loaded with caryatids and trophies, state dressers of bold and spirited outlines, curiously-carved cabinets ornamented with gold and cameos, tables supported by mythological figures and engarlanded satyrs, all pieces of furniture belonging to the Burgundian school, have a family likeness. This class of furniture represents a living, picturesque art, brilliantly executed, and vigorous, spirited, and ornamental in appearance, occasionally provincial and lacking taste, but always finished with extreme care.

(Conclusion to follow.)

